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Book Reviews

The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah. A Revised Translation with Introductions and Short Explanations. By REV. S. R. DRIVER, D. D. New York: Scribners, 1906. Pp. lvi + 382. \$1.50.

Jeremiah is the tragic poet of Israel, the prophet of downfall and catastrophe, whose own life story was accompaniment and counterpart of his nation's calamity. If his book has sometimes failed to meet our moods or reach our understanding, it is in part because the passion and the tragedy of a far-away age come not to us with the conviction of reality; tears that were shed in Jerusalem in the sixth century before Christ or the horrors and wild carnage of a siege by armies that now are dust, seem capable only of archeological interest. Our English commentators are singularly silent on Jeremiah. The Germans have thought him worth while and have produced works comprehensive and appreciative. We may hope for like commentaries in the future that will enlarge our knowledge and quicken our interest, but as a beginning Professor Driver has put forth a work that enables the English reader to grasp the essentials of the situation. Yet it is not a commentary in the strict sense of the word that has been given us. It is really "The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah" itself. The book is allowed to tell its own story, by the help of proper paragraphing, quotation marks, and modern English, not colloquial or free and easy expressions nor commonplaces of everyday, but good English such as the best writers use. Some of the words of 1611 have been replaced, but archaisms are not barred when they are intelligible and give the flavor for which we love the speech of the King James's version. So Jeremiah speaks again and his voice has a resonance even over the clamant sounds of the twentieth century.

The translation is new throughout; difficult verses are dealt with in a spirit of greater freedom than is possible in our versions, for changes of pointing or emendation from the Septuagint are sometimes adopted. There might have been a larger use of metrical forms in the case of passages of strong lyrical intensity, but the *qinah* or elegiac measure is the one most often reproduced. This indeed is the only one of the old Hebrew measures concerning which we may be said to possess certainty. On p. 127 is a good example of a *qinah*: the long line of the couplet dying away each time in notes of mournful retrospect or despair. Certain words

which we have read all our lives need the revivification of a new translation. Such a one is the Hebrew word "heart" which here appears as understanding; "backsliding" becomes backturning, which indicates an act more voluntary and perverse than the older one. The somewhat fastidious effort of the American Revision to substitute a more euphonious word for "bowels" in Jer. 4:19, gives a result almost ludicrous in its mistranslation. Professor Driver wisely retains the literal rendering, which is intelligible and correct as well as interesting in its psychological import.

But more is needed than a good text and translation and our author furnishes much here by way of suggestion and help. The Introduction outlines Jeremiah's career and describes his times, which were colored by his very life. The literary features of the book are not neglected and as an illustration of a constructive phase of the higher criticism we are given a list of expressions wherein Jeremiah's style is unmistakably manifest—the recurrent phrases which like refrains of sorrow, but sometimes too of hope and faith, reveal the prophet's changing moods. To most English readers the chronology of Jeremiah is a hopeless maze; indeed the displacement of large sections of the text almost defies the chronologist, but the Introduction sketches rapidly the growth of the book to its final form, through the vicissitudes that attended the production and publication of the different rolls. The Septuagint had a shorter text. The leading facts concerning this we are told in a few paragraphs. The reader needs from time to time a word of explanation as he studies a classical author, and this is none the less true for Jeremiah. This is provided for in paragraph headings which summarize the subject-matter and present the most important facts about place and date and circumstance. On p. 300 is a typographical error. Instead of chap. lii we should read chap. li. The section discussed (chap. 50—51:58) has another tone than Jeremiah's and two pages are devoted to a résumé of critical opinion. Good reason is shown for believing it to be later than the period of Jeremiah's activity, though its addition to his well-attested prophecies was not an unnatural thing to happen.

The numerous footnotes furnish an indispensable exegetical apparatus. They are critical, expository, historical, and archeological. Those on "roof-chambers," p. 129, and "millstones," p. 147, are valuable examples. If one needs further help on words and phrases, there are the additional notes on pp. 336–70 and the glossary of Archaisms, pp. 371 ff. The work is a model both in its selection of material and its condensation, and by it Professor Driver increases the obligation which the world of biblical scholarship already owes him.

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